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**ART. II.—*Poetry and Romance of the Italians.***

1. *Della Letteratura Italiana, Di Camillo Ugoni.* III. Tom. 12mo. Brescia. 1820.
2. *Storia della Letteratura Italiana. Del cavaliere Giuseppe Maffei.* III. Tom. 12mo. Milano. 1825.
3. *Storia della Letteratura Italiana nel secolo XVIII. di Antonio Lombardi.* III. Tom. 8vo. Modena. 1827–9.

It is not our intention to go into an analysis, or even to discuss the merits of the works at the head of this article, which we have selected only as a text for such reflections on the poetry and ornamental prose writing of the Italians, as might naturally suggest themselves to an English reader. The points of view from which a native contemplates his own literature, and those from which it is seen by a foreigner, are so dissimilar, that it would be hardly possible that they should come precisely to the same results, without affectation or servility on the part of the latter. The native, indeed, is far better qualified than any foreigner can be, to estimate the productions of his own countrymen; but as each is subjected to peculiar influences, truth may be more likely to be elicited from a collision of their mutual opinions, than from those exclusively of either.

The Italian, although the first modern tongue to produce what still endure as classical models of composition, was of all the Romance dialects, the last to be applied to literary purposes. The poem of the *Cid*, which, with all its rawness, exhibits the frank bearing of the age in a highly poetic aspect, was written nearly a century previously to this event. The northern French, which even some Italian scholars of that day condescended to employ as the most popular vehicle of thought, had been richly cultivated, indemnifying itself in anticipation, as it were, by this extraordinary precocity, for the poetic sterility with which it has been cursed ever since. In the south, and along the shores of the Mediterranean, every remote corner was alive with the voice of song. A beautiful poetry had ripened into perfection there and nearly perished, before the first lisps of the Italian Muse were heard, not in her own land, but at the court of a foreigner, in Sicily. The poets of Lombardy wrote in the Provençal. The histories,—and almost every city had its historian, and some two or three,—were composed

in Latin, or in some half-formed discordant dialect of the country. 'The Italian of that age,' says Tiraboschi, 'more nearly resembled the Latin, than the Tuscan does now any of her sister dialects.' It seemed doubtful which of the conflicting idioms would prevail, when a mighty genius arose, who, collecting the scattered elements together, formed one of those wonderful creations which make an epoch in the history of civilization, and forever fixed the destinies of his language.

We shall not trouble our readers with a particular criticism on so popular a work as the *Divine Comedy*, but confine ourselves to a few such desultory observations as have been suggested on a re-perusal of it. The *Inferno* is more frequently quoted and eulogised than any other portion of the *Commedia*. It exhibits a more marked progress of the action; and while it affects us by its deepened pictures of misery, it owes no doubt something to the piquant personalities, which have to this day not entirely lost their relish. Notwithstanding this, it by no means displays the whole of its author's intellectual power; and so very various are the merits of the different portions of his epic, that one who has not read the whole may be truly said not to have read Dante. The poet has borrowed the hints for his punishments, partly from ancient mythology, partly from the metaphorical denunciations of Scripture, but principally from his own inexhaustible fancy; and he has adapted them to the specific crimes with a truly frightful ingenuity. We could wish that he had made more use of the mind as a means of torture, and thus given a finer moral coloring to the picture. One example only of this occurs to us; that of the counterfeiter Adamo, who sharpens the sting of remorse, by contrasting his present dismal abode with his ancient residence on the beautiful banks of the Arno. This defect is particularly conspicuous in his portraiture of Satan, who, far different from that Spirit, whose form had yet not lost all her original brightness, is depicted in all the bugbear deformities of a nursery tale. This decidedly bad taste must be imputed to the rudeness of the age in which Dante lived. The progress of refinement is shown in Tasso's subsequent portrait of this same personage, who 'towering like Calpe or huge Atlas,' is sustained by that unconquerable temper, which gives life to the yet more spiritualized conceptions of Milton. The faults of Dante, as we have said, were those of his age.

But in his elevated conceptions, in the wild and desolating gloom which he has thrown around the city of the dead, the world saw for the first time, the genius of modern literature fully displayed; and in his ripe and vigorous versification, it beheld also for the first time, the poetical capacities of a modern idiom.\*

The Purgatory relies for its interest on no strong emotion, but on a contemplative moral tone, and on such luxuriant descriptions of nature, as bring it much nearer to the style of English poetry, than any other part of the work. It is on the Paradise, however, that Dante has lavished all the stores of his fancy. Yet he has not succeeded in his attempt to exhibit there a regular gradation of happiness, for happiness cannot, like pain, be measured by any scale of physical sensations. Neither is he always successful in the notions which he has conveyed of the occupations of the blessed. There was no source, indeed, whence he could derive this knowledge. The Scriptures present no determinate idea of such occupations; and the mythology of the ancients had so little that was consolatory in it, even to themselves, that the shade of Achilles is made to say in the *Odyssey*, that 'he had rather be the slave of the meanest living man, than rule as a sovereign among the dead.'

Dante wisely placed the moral sources of happiness in the exercises of the mind. The most agreeable of these to himself, though, perhaps, to few of his readers, was metaphysical polemics. He had, unfortunately, in his youth, gained a prize for successful disputation at the schools, and in every page of these gladiatorial exhibitions, we discern the disciple of Scotus and Aquinas. His *matériel* is made up of light, music, and motion. These he has arranged in every possible variety of combination. We are borne along from one magnificent *fête* to another; and as we rise in the scale of being, the motion of the celestial dance increases in velocity, the light shines with redoubled brilliancy, and the music is of a more ravishing sweetness, until all is confounded in the intolerable splendors of the Deity.

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\* Dante anticipated the final triumph of the Italian, with a generous confidence, not shared by the more timid scholars of his own or the succeeding age. See his eloquent apology for it in his *Convito*,—especially, pp. 81, 82. Tom. IV. ed. 1758. See also *Purg. Can. XXIV.*

Dante has failed in his attempt to personify the Deity. Who indeed has not? No such personification can be effected without the aid of illustration from physical objects; and how degrading are these to our conceptions of Omnipotence! The repeated failures of the Italians, who have attempted this in the arts of design, are still more conspicuous. Even the genius of Raphael has only furnished another proof of the impotence of his art. The advancement of taste may be again seen in Tasso's representation of the Supreme Being, by his attributes;\* and with similar discretion, Milton, like the Grecian artist, who drew a mantle over the countenance, which he could not trust himself to paint, whenever he has introduced the Deity, has veiled his glories in a cloud.

The characters and conditions of Dante and Milton, were too analogous not to have often invited the parallel. Both took an active part in the revolutions of their age. Both lived to see the extinction of their own hopes, and the ruin of their party; and it was the fate of both to compose their immortal poems in poverty and disgrace. These circumstances, however, produced different effects on their minds. Milton, in solitude and darkness, from the cheerful ways of men cut off, was obliged to seek inwardly that celestial light, which, as he pathetically laments, was denied to him from without. Hence his poem breathes a spirit of lofty contemplation, which is never disturbed by the impurities that disfigure the page of Dante. The latter poet, an exile in a foreign land, condemned to eat the bread of dependence, from the hands of his ancient enemies, felt the iron enter more deeply into his soul, and in the spirit of his age, has too often made his verses the vehicle of his vindictive scorn. Both stood forth the sturdy champions of freedom in every form, above all, of intellectual freedom. The same spirit which animates the controversial writings of Milton, glows with yet fiercer heat in every page of the Divine Comedy. How does its author denounce the abuses, the crying abuses of the church, its hypocrisies, and manifold perversions of Scripture! How boldly does he declare his determination to proclaim the truth, that he may live in the memory of the just hereafter! His Ghibeline connexions were indeed unfavorable to these principles. But these connexions were the result of necessity, not of choice. His

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\* Ger. Lib. CIX. s. 56.

hardy spirit had been nursed in the last ages of the Republic ; and it may be truly said of him, that he became a Ghibeline, in the hope of again becoming a Florentine. The love of his native soil, as with most exiles, was a vital principle with him. How pathetically does he recall those good old times, when the sons of Florence were sure to find a grave within her walls ! Even the bitterness of his heart against her, which breaks forth in the very courts of Heaven, proves, paradoxical as it may appear, the tenacity of his affection. It might not be easy to rouse the patriotism of a modern Italian, even into this symptom of vitality.

The genius of both was of the severest kind. For this reason, any display of their sensibility, like the light breaking through a dark cloud, affects us the more by contrast. Such are the sweet pictures of domestic bliss in *Paradise Lost*, and the tender tale of Francesca di Rimini in the *Inferno*. Both are sublime in the highest signification of the term ; but Milton is an ideal poet and delights in generalization, while Dante is the most literal of artists, and paints every thing in detail. He refuses no imagery, however mean, that can illustrate his subject. This is too notorious to require exemplification. He is, moreover, eminently distinguished by the power of depicting his thought by a single vigorous touch ; a manner well known in Italy under the name of *Dantesque*. It would not be easy for such a verse as the following, without sacrifice of idiom, to be condensed within the same compass in our language.

‘Con viso, che tacendo dicea, taci.’

It would be interesting to trace the similarity of tastes in these great minds, as exhibited in their pleasures equally with their serious pursuits ; in their exquisite sensibility to music ; in their early fondness for those ancient romances, which they have so often celebrated both in prose and verse. But our limits will not allow us to pursue the subject any further.

Dante’s epic was greeted by his countrymen in that rude age with the general enthusiasm, with which they have ever welcomed the works of genius. A chair was instituted at Florence, for the exposition of the *Divine Comedy*, and Boccaccio was the first who filled it. The bust of its author was crowned with laurels ; his daughter was maintained at the public expense, and the fickle Florentines vainly solicited from Ra-

venna the ashes of their poet, whom they had so bitterly persecuted when living.

Notwithstanding all this, the father of Italian verse has had a much less sensible influence on the taste of his countrymen, than either of the illustrious triumvirate of the fourteenth century. His bold, masculine diction, and his concentrated thought were ill suited to the effeminacy of his nation. One or two clumsy imitators of him appeared in his own age ; and in ours a school has been formed, professing to be modelled on the severe principles of the *trecentisti*. But no one has yet arisen to bend the bow of Ulysses.

Several poets wrote in the Tuscan or Italian dialect at the close of the thirteenth century with tolerable purity ; but their amorous effusions would, probably, like those in the Provençal, have rapidly passed into oblivion, had the language not been consecrated by some established work of genius like the *Divina Commedia*. It was fortunate that its author selected a subject, which enabled him to exhibit the peculiar genius of Christianity, and of modern institutions, and to demonstrate their immense superiority for poetical purposes over those of antiquity. It opened a cheering prospect to those who doubted the capacities of a modern idiom ; and after ages of barbarism, it was welcomed as the sign, that the waters had at length passed from the face of the earth.

We have been detained long upon Dante, though somewhat contrary to our intention of discussing classes rather than individuals, from the circumstance, that he constitutes in himself, if we may so say, an entire and independent class. We shall now proceed, as concisely as possible, to touch upon some of the leading peculiarities in the lyrical poetry of the Italians, which forms with them a very important branch of letters.

Lyrical poetry is more immediately the offspring of imagination or of deep feeling, than any other kind of verse, and there can be little chance of reaching to high excellence in it among a nation, whose character is defective in these qualities. The Italians are, undoubtedly, the most prolific in this department, as the French are the least so, of any people in Europe. Nothing, indeed, can be more mechanical than a French ode. Reason, wit, pedantry, any thing but inspiration, find their way into it ; and when the poet is in extremity, like the countryman in the fable, he calls upon the pagan gods of antiquity to help him out. The best ode in the lan-

guage, according to La Harpe, is that of J. B. Rousseau on the Count de Luc, in which Phœbus, or the Fates, Pluto, Ceres or Cybele, figure in every stanza. There is little of the genuine *impetus sacer* in all this. Lyrical compositions, the expression of natural sensibility, are generally most abundant in the earlier periods of a nation's literature. Such are the beautiful collections of rural minstrelsy in our own tongue, and the fine old ballads and songs in the Castilian; which last have had the advantage over ours of being imitated down to a late day, by their most polished writers. But Italy is the only country in which lyrical composition from the first, instead of assuming a plebeian garb, has received all the perfection of literary finish; and which, amidst every vicissitude of taste, has been cultivated by the most polished writers of the age.

One cause of this is to be found in the circumstances and peculiar character of the father of Italian song. The life of Petrarch furnishes the most brilliant example of the triumph of letters, in an age and country too where literary celebrity was not often the path to political consequence. Princes and pontiffs, cities and universities vied with each other in lavishing honors upon him. His tour through Italy was a sort of royal progress; the inhabitants of the cities thronging out to meet him, and providing a residence for him at the public expense.

The two most enlightened capitals in Europe contended with each other for the honor of his poetical coronation. His influence was solicited in the principal negotiations of the Italian States, and he enjoyed at the same time the confidence of the ferocious Visconti, and the accomplished Robert of Naples. His immense correspondence connected him with the principal characters, both literary and political, throughout Europe, and his personal biography may be said to constitute the history of his age.

It must be confessed, that the heart of Petrarch was not insensible to this universal homage, and that his writings occasionally betray the vanity and caprice, which indicate the spoiled child of fortune. But with this moderate alloy of humanity, his general deportment exhibits a purity of principle and a generous elevation of sentiment, far above the degenerate politics of his time. He was, indeed, the first in an age of servility, as Dante had been the last in an age of freedom. If he was intimate with some of the petty tyrants of Lombardy, he never prostituted his genius to the vindication of



their vices. His political negotiations were conducted with the most generous and extended views for the weal of all Italy. How independently did he remonstrate with Dandolo on his war with the Genoese! How did he lift his voice against the lawless banditti, who, as foreign mercenaries, ravaged the fair plains of Lombardy! How boldly, to a degree which makes it difficult to account for his personal safety, did he thunder his invectives against the western Babylon!

Even his failings were those of a generous nature. Dwelling much of his time at a distance from his native land, he considered himself rather as a citizen of Italy, than of any particular district of it. He contemplated her with the eye of an ancient Roman, and wished to see the Imperial City once more resume her supremacy among the nations. This led him for a moment to give into the brilliant illusion of liberty, which Rienzi awakened. 'Who would not,' he says, appealing to the Romans, 'rather die a freeman than live a slave?''\* But when he saw that he had been deceived, he did not attempt to conceal his indignation, and in an animated expostulation with the tribune, he admonishes him that he is the minister, not the master of the republic, and that treachery to one's country is a crime which nothing can expiate.†

As he wandered amid the ruins of Rome, he contemplated with horror the violation of her venerable edifices, and he called upon the pontiffs to return to the protection of their 'widowed metropolis.' He was above all, solicitous for the recovery of the intellectual treasures of antiquity, sparing no expense or personal fatigue in this cause. Many of the mouldering manuscripts he restored or copied with his own hand; and his beautiful transcript of the epistles of Cicero is still to be seen in the Laurentian Library at Florence.

The influence of his example is visible in the generous emulation for letters kindled throughout Italy, and in the purer principles of taste, which directed the studies of the schools.‡ His extensive correspondence diffused to the re-

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\* Epist. ad Nic. Laurentii.—Opera, p. 535.

† Famil. Epist. Lib. VII. ep. 7. p. 677. Basil Ed.

‡ In Florence, for example, with a population which Villani, at the middle of the fourteenth century, reckons at 90,000 souls, there were from eight to ten thousand children who received a liberal education, (Istor. Fiorent. Lib. XI. Cap. 93) at a time when the higher classes in the rest of Europe were often uninstructed in the elementary principles of knowledge.

motest corners of Europe the sacred flame, which glowed so brightly in his own bosom ; and it may be truly said that he possessed an intellectual empire, such as was never before enjoyed, and, probably, never can be again, in the comparatively high state of civilization to which the world is arrived.

It is not, however, the antiquarian researches of Petrarch, nor those elaborate Latin compositions, which secured to him the laurel wreath of poetry in the capitol, that have kept his memory still green in the hearts of his countrymen, but those humbler effusions in his own language, which he did not even condescend to mention in his Letter to Posterity, and which he freely gave away as alms to ballad-singers. It was auspicious for Italian literature, that a poet like Dante should have been followed by one of so flexible a character as Petrarch. It was beauty succeeding vigor. The language to which Dante had given all its compactness and energy, was far from having reached the full harmony of numbers of which it was capable. He had, moreover, occasionally distorted it into such Latinized inversions, uncouth phrases, Hebraisms and Grecisms, as were foreign to the genius of the tongue. These blemishes, of so little account in Dante's extensive poem, would have been fatal to the lyrical pieces of Petrarch, which, like miniatures, from their minuteness, demand the highest finish of detail. The pains, which the latter poet bestowed on the correction of his verses, are almost inconceivable. Some of them would appear, from the memoranda which he has left, to have been submitted to the file for weeks, nay, months before he dismissed them. Nor was this fastidiousness of taste frivolous in one who was correcting not for himself, but for posterity, and who, in these peculiar graces of style, was creating beautiful and permanent forms of expression for his countrymen. His acquaintance with the modern dialects, especially the Spanish and the Provençal, enriched his vocabulary with many exotic beauties. His fine ear disposed him to refuse all but the most harmonious combinations of sound. He was accustomed to try the melody of his verses by the lute, and, like the fabled Theban, built up his elegant fabric by the charms of music. By these means he created a style scarcely more antiquated than that of the present day, and which can hardly be said to contain an obsolete phrase ; an assertion not to be ventured respecting any author in our language, before the days of Queen Anne.

Indeed, even a foreigner can hardly open a page of Petrarch, without being struck with the precocity of a language, which, like the vegetation of an arctic summer, seems to have ripened into full maturity at once. There is nothing analogous to this in any other tongue with which we are acquainted, unless it be the Greek, which in the poems of Homer appears to have attained its last perfection; a circumstance which has led Cicero to remark in his *Brutus*, that 'there must doubtless have existed poets antecedent to Homer, since invention and perfection can hardly go together.'

The mass of Petrarch's Italian poetry, is, as is well known, of an amorous complexion. He was naturally of a melancholy temperament, and his unfortunate passion became with him the animating principle of being. His compositions in the Latin, as well as those in the vulgar tongue, his voluminous correspondence, his private memoranda or confessions, which from their nature seem never to have been destined for the public eye, all exhibit this passion in one shape or another. Yet there have been those who have affected to doubt even the existence of such a personage as Laura.

His Sonnets and Canzoni, chronologically arranged, exhibit pretty fairly the progress of his life and love, and as such, have been judiciously used by the Abbé de Sade. The most trivial event seems to have stirred the poetic feeling within him. We find no less than four sonnets indited to his mistress's gloves, and three to her eyes; which last, styled *par excellence*, the 'Three Sisters,' are in the greatest repute with his countrymen; a judgment on which most English critics would be at issue with them. Notwithstanding the vicious affectation of style, and the mysticism which occasionally obscure these and other pieces of Petrarch, his general tone exhibits a moral dignity unknown to the sordid appetites of the ancients; and an earnestness of passion rarely reflected from the cold glitter of the Provençal. But it is in the verses, written after the death of his mistress, that he confesses the inspiration of Christianity, in the deep moral coloring which he has given to his descriptions of nature, and in those visions of immortal happiness which he contrasts with the sad realities of the present life. He dwells rather on the melancholy pleasures of retrospection, than those of hope; unlike most of the poets of Italy, whose warm sunny skies seem to have scattered the gloom, which hangs over the poetry of the North. In this,

and some other peculiarities, Dante and Petrarch appear to have borne greater resemblance to the English, than to their own nation.

Petrarch's career, however brilliant, may serve rather as a warning than as a model. The querulous tone of some of his later writings, the shade of real sorrow, which seems to come across even his brightest moments, show the utter inefficacy of genius and of worldly glory to procure to their possessor a substantial happiness. It is melancholy to witness the aberrations of mind, into which so fine a genius was led by unfortunate passion. The apparition of Laura haunted him by night as well as by day, in society and in solitude. He sought to divert his mind by travelling, by political or literary occupation, by reason and religion, but in vain. His letters and private confessions, show, no less than his poetry, how incessantly his imagination was tortured by doubts, hopes, fears, melancholy presages, regrets, and despair. She triumphed over the decay of her personal charms, and even over the grave, for it was a being of the mind he worshipped. There is something affecting in seeing such a mind as Petrarch's feeding on this unrequited passion, and more than twenty years after his mistress's death, and when on the verge of the grave himself, depicting her in all the bright coloring of youthful fancy, and following her in anticipation to that Heaven where he hopes soon to be united to her.

Petrarch's example, even in his own day, was widely infectious. He sarcastically complains of the quantities of verses sent to him for correction, from the farthest north, from Germany and the British Isles, then the *Ultima Thule* of civilization. The pedants of the succeeding age, it is true, wasted their efforts in hopeless experiments upon the ancient languages, whose chilling influence seems to have entirely closed the hand of the native minstrel; and it was not until the time of Lorenzo de' Medici, whose correct taste led him to prefer the flexible movements of a living tongue, that the sweet tones of the Italian lyre were again awakened. The excitement, however, soon became general, affecting all ranks, from the purpled prelate down to the most vulgar artisan; and a collection of the *Beauties*, (as we should call them,) of this latter description of gentry, has been gathered into a respectable volume, which Baretti assures us, with a good-natured criticism, may be compared with the verses of Petrarch. In all these

the burden of the song is love. Those who did not feel, could at least affect the tender passion. Lorenzo de' Medici pitched upon a mistress as deliberately as Don Quixote did on his Dulcinea; and Tasso sighed away his soul, to a nymph so shadowy as sorely to have puzzled his commentators, till the time of Serassi.

It would be unavailing to attempt to characterize those who have followed in the footsteps of the Laureate, or we might dwell on the romantic sweetness of Lorenzo de' Medici, the purity of Vittoria Colonna, the elaborate polish of Bembo, the vivacity of Marini, and the eloquence, the platonic reveries and rich coloring of Tasso, whose beauties, and whose defects, so nearly resemble those of his great original in this department. But we have no leisure to go minutely into the shades of difference between the imitators of Petrarch. One may regret, that amidst their clouds of amorous incense, he can so rarely discern the religious or patriotic enthusiasm, which animates the similar compositions of the Spanish poets, and which forms the noblest basis of lyrical poetry at all times. The wrongs of Italy, the common battle-field of the banditti of Europe for nearly a century, and at the very time when her poetic vein flowed most freely, might well have roused the indignation of her children. The comparatively few specimens on this theme from Petrarch to Filicaja are justly regarded as the happiest efforts of the Italian lyre.

The seventeenth century, so unfortunate for the national literature in all other respects, was marked by a bolder deviation from the eternal track of the Petrarchists; a reform indeed, which may be traced back to Casa. Among these innovators, Chiabrera, whom Tiraboschi styles both Anacreon and Pindar, but who may be content with the former of these appellations, and Filicaja, who has found in the Christian faith sources of a sublimity that Pindar could never reach, are the most conspicuous. Their salutary example has not been lost on the modern Italian writers.

Some of the ancients have made a distinct division of lyrical poetry, under the title of *melicus*.\* If, as it would seem, they mean something of a more calm and uniform tenor, than the impetuous dithyrambic flow; something in which symmetry of form, and melody of versification are chiefly considered; in

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\* Ausonius, Edyl. IV. 54.—Cicero, De Opt. Gen. Oratorum, I.

which, in fine, the effeminate beauties of sentiment are preferred to the more hardy conceptions of fancy, the term may be significant of the great mass of Italian lyrics. But we fear that we have insisted too far on their defects. Our criticism has been formed rather on the average, than on the highest specimens of the art. In this way the very luxuriance of the soil is a disadvantage to it. The sins of exuberance, however, are much more corrigible than those of sterility, which fall upon this department of poetry, in almost every other nation. We must remember, too, that no people has exhibited the passion of love under such a variety of beautiful aspects, and that, after all, although the amount be comparatively small, no other modern nation can probably produce so many examples of the very highest lyrical inspiration.

But it is time that we should turn to the Romantic Epics, the most important and perhaps the most prolific branch of the ornamental literature of the Italians.\* They have been distributed into a great variety of classes by their own critics. We shall confine our remarks to some of their most eminent models, without regard to their classification.

Those who expect to find in these poems the same temper which animates the old English tales of chivalry, will be disappointed. A much more correct notion of their manner may be formed from Mr. Ellis's *Bernesque* (if we may be allowed a significant term) recapitulations of these latter. In short, they are the marvels of an heroic age, told with the fine incredulous air of a polite one. It is this contrast of the dignity of the matter with the familiarity of the manner of narration, that has occasioned among their countrymen so many silly disputes respecting the serious or satirical intentions of Pulci, Ariosto, Berni, and the rest.

The Italians, although they have brought tales of chivalry to higher perfection, than any other people in the world, are of all others, in their character, the most anti-chivalrous. Their early republican institutions, which brought all classes nearly to the same level, were obviously unfavorable to the spirit of chivalry. Commerce became the road to preferment. Wealth was their

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\* In this division of our subject, we have exhibited much the same views as those contained in an article published in the forty-fifth number of this journal, to which we refer those of our readers who are desirous of seeing the narrative poetry of Italy treated *in extenso*.

pedigree, and their patent of nobility. The magnificent Medici were bankers and merchants; and the ancient aristocracy of Venice employed their capital in traffic, until an advanced period of the republic. Courage, so essential in the character of a knight, was of little account in the busy communities of Italy. Like Carthage of old, they trusted their defence to mercenaries, first foreign, and afterwards native, but who in every instance fought for hire, not honor, selling themselves, and often their employers, to the highest bidder; and who, cased in impenetrable mail, fought with so little personal hazard, that Machiavelli has related more than one infamous encounter, in which the only lives lost were from suffocation under their ponderous panoplies. So low had the military reputation of the Italians declined, that in the war of the Neapolitan succession in 1502, it was thought necessary for thirteen of their body to vindicate the national character from the imputation of cowardice, by solemn defiance and battle against an equal number of French knights, in presence of the hostile armies.

Hence other arts came to be studied than that of war,—the arts of diplomacy and intrigue. Hence statesmen were formed, but not soldiers. The campaign was fought in the cabinet, instead of the field. Every spring of cunning and corruption was essayed, and an insidious policy came into vogue, in which, as the philosopher, who has digested its principles into a system, informs us, ‘the failure, not the atrocity of a deed, was considered disgraceful.’\* The law of honor became different with the Italians, from what it was with other nations. Conspiracy was preferred to open defiance, and assassination was a legitimate method of revenge. The State of Venice condescended to employ a secret agent against the life of Francis Sforza; and the noblest escutcheons in Italy, those of Este and the Medici, were stained with the crimes of fratricide and incest.

In this general moral turpitude, the literature of Italy was rapidly advancing to its highest perfection. There was scarcely a petty State, which, in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, had not made brilliant advances in elegant prose, poetry, or the arts of design. Intellectual culture was widely diffused, and men of the highest rank devoted

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\* Machiavelli, *Istor. Fior.* L. VI.

themselves with eagerness to the occupation of letters;—this, too, at a time when learning in other countries was banished to colleges and cloisters; when books were not always essential in the education of a gentleman. Du Guesclin, the flower of French chivalry in the fourteenth century, could not read a word. Castiglione, in his *Cortegiano*, has given us so pleasing a picture of the recreations of the little court of Urbino, one of the many into which Italy was distributed at the close of the fifteenth century, as to suggest an exalted notion of its taste and cultivated habits; and Guicciardini has described with all the eloquence of regret, the flourishing condition of his country at the same period, ere the storm had descended on her beautiful valleys. In all this we see the characteristics of a highly polished state of society, but none of the hardy virtues of chivalry.

It was precisely in such a state of society, light, lively, and licentious, possessed of a high relish for the beauties of imagination, but without moral dignity, or even a just moral sense, that the Muse of romance first appeared in Italy; and it was not to be expected that she would retain there her majestic Castilian port, or the frank, cordial bearing, which endeared her to our Norman ancestors. In fact, the Italian fancy seems to have caught rather the gay, gossiping temper of the *fabliaux*. The most familiar and grotesque adventures are mixed in with the most serious; and even these last are related in a fine tone of ironical pleasantry. Magnificent inventions are recommended by agreeable illusions of style; but they not unfrequently furnish a flimsy drapery for impurity of sentiment. The high devotion and general moral aspect of our English *Fairie Queene*, are not characteristic, with a few eminent exceptions, of Italian tales of chivalry, in which we too often find the best interests of our nature exposed to all the license of frivolous banter. Pulci, who has furnished an apology for the infamous *Pucelle*\* and *Fortiguerra*, with their school of imitators, may afford abundant examples to the curious in these matters.

The first successful models of the romantic Epic, were exhibited at the table of Lorenzo de' Medici; that remarkable

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\* See Voltaire's Preface to it. Chapelain's prosy poem on the same subject, *La Pucelle d'Orleans*, lives now only in the satire of Boileau. It was the hard fate of the Heroine of Orleans to be canonized in a dull Epic, and damned in a witty one.



man, who, as Machiavelli says of him, 'seemed to unite in his person two distinct natures,' who could pass from the severe duties of the council-chamber, to mingle in the dances of the people, and from the abstractions of his favorite philosophy to the broad merriment of a convivial table. Amid all the elegance of the Medici, however,—of Lorenzo and Leo X.,—there seems to have been a lurking appetite for vulgar pleasure; at least, if we may judge from the coarse satirical repartee, which Franco and his friend Pulci poured out upon one another, for the entertainment of their patron, and the still more bald buffoonery which enlivened the palace of his pontifical son.

The Stanze of Politian, however, exhibit no trace of this obliquity of taste. This fragment of an Epic, almost too brief for criticism, like a prelude to some beautiful air, seems to have opened the way to those delightful creations of the Muse, which so rapidly followed, and to have contained within itself all their various elements of beauty, the invention of Boiardo, the picturesque narrative of Ariosto, and Tasso's flush of color. Every stanza is music to the ear, and affords a distinct picture to the eye. Unfortunately Politian was soon seduced by the fashion of the age from the culture of his native tongue. Probably no Italian poet, of equal promise, was ever sacrificed to the Manes of antiquity. His voluminous Latin labors are now forgotten, and this fragment of an Epic affords almost the only point, from which he is still contemplated by posterity.

Pulci's *Morgante* is the first thorough-bred romance of chivalry, which the Italians have received as *text of the tongue*. It is fashioned much more literally than any of its successors, on Turpin's Chronicle, that gross medley of fact and fable, too barren for romance, too false for history; the dunghill, from which have shot up, nevertheless, the bright flowers of French and Italian fiction. In like manner as in this, religion, not love, is the principle of Pulci's action. The theological talk of his devils, may remind one of the prosy conference of Roland and Ferracute; and, strange to say, he is the only one of the eminent Italian poets, who has adopted from the chronicle the celebrated rout at Roncesvalles. In his concluding cantos, which those who have censured him as a purely satirical or burlesque poet, can have hardly reached, Pulci, throwing off the vulgar trammels which seem to have oppressed his genius, rises into the noblest conceptions of poetry, and describes the tragical catastrophe with all the eloquence of pathos and moral

grandeur. Had he written often thus, the Morgante would now be resorted to by native purists, not merely as the well of Tuscan undefiled, but as the genuine fount of epic inspiration.

From the rank and military profession of Boiardo, it might be expected, that his poem, the Orlando Innamorato, would display more of the lofty tone of chivalry, than is usual with his countrymen. But, with some exceptions, the portrait of Ruggiero, for example, it will be difficult to discern this. He, however, excels them all in a certain force of characterizing, and in an inexhaustible fertility of invention. His *dramatis personæ*, continued by Ariosto, might afford an excellent subject for a parallel, which we have not room to discuss. In general, he may be said to sculpture, where Ariosto paints. His heroes assume a fiercer and more indomitable aspect, and his Amazonian females a more glaring and less fastidious coquetry. But it is in the regions of pure fancy that his Muse delights to sport; where, instead of the cold conceptions of a Northern brain, which make up the machinery of Pulci, we are introduced to the delicate fairies of the East, to gardens blooming in the midst of the desert, to palaces of crystal, winged steeds, enchanted armor, and all the gay fabric of Oriental mythology. It has been the singular fate of Boiardo to have had his story continued and excelled by one poet, and his style reformed by another, until his own original work, and even his name, have passed into comparative oblivion. Berni's *rifacimento* is perhaps the most remarkable instance of the triumph of style on record. Every stanza reflects the sense of the original; yet such is the fascination of his diction, compared with the provincial barbarism of his predecessor, as to remind one of those mutations in romance, where some old and withered hag is suddenly transformed into a blooming fairy. It may be doubted, whether this could have succeeded so completely in a language, where the beauties of style are less appreciated. Dryden has made a similar attempt in the *Canterbury Tales*; but who does not prefer the racy, romantic sweetness of Chaucer?

The Orlando Furioso, from its superior literary execution, as well as from its union of all the peculiarities of Italian tales of chivalry, may be taken as the representative of the whole species. Some of the national critics have condemned, and some have endeavored to justify these peculiarities of the romantic epopee; its complicated narrative, and provoking

interruptions, its transitions from the gravest to the most familiar topics, its lawless extravagance of fiction, and other deviations from the statutes of antiquity ; but very few have attempted to explain them on just and philosophical principles. The romantic eccentricities of the Italian poets are not to be imputed either to inattention or ignorance. Most of them were accomplished scholars, and went to their work with all the forecast of consummate artists. Boiardo was so well versed in the ancient tongues, as to have made accurate translations of Herodotus and Apuleius. Ariosto was such an elegant Latinist, that even the classic Bembo did not disdain to learn from him the mysteries of Horace. He consulted his friends over and over again on the disposition of his fable, assigning to them the most sufficient reasons for its complicated texture. In like manner, Tasso shows, in his Poetical Discourses, how deeply he had revolved the principles of his art, and his Letters prove his dexterity in the application of these principles to his own compositions. These illustrious minds understood well the difference between copying the ancients, and copying nature. They knew that to write by the rules of the former, is not to write like them ; that the genius of our institutions requires new and peculiar forms of expression ; that nothing is more fantastic than a modern antique ; and they wisely left the attempt and the failure to such spiritless pedants as Trissino.

The difference subsisting between the ancients and moderns in the constitution of society, amply justifies the different principles on which they have proceeded in their works of imagination. Religion, love, honor :—what different ideas are conveyed by these terms in these different periods of history !\* The love of country was the pervading feeling, which, in the ancient Greek or Roman, seems to have absorbed every other, and to have obliterated, as it were, the moral idiosyncrasy of the individual ; while with the moderns, it is the *individual* who stands forward in principal relief. His loves, his private feuds, and personal adventures, form the object almost of exclusive attention. Hence, in the classical fable, strict

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\*How feeble, as an operative principle, must religion have been among a people who openly avowed it to be the creation of their own poets. ‘Homer and Hesiod,’ says Herodotus, ‘created the theogony of the Greeks, assigning to the Gods their various titles, characters and forms.’ Herod. II. 63. Religion, it is well known, was a principal basis of modern chivalry.

unity of action and concentration of interest are demanded ; while in the romantic, the object is best attained by variety of action and diversity of interest, and the threads of personal adventure separately conducted, and perpetually intersecting each other, make up the complicated texture of the fable. Hence it becomes so exceedingly difficult to discern who is the real hero, and what the main action, in such poems as the *Innamorato* and *Furioso*. Hence too, the episode, the accident, if we may so say, of the classical epic, becomes the essence of the romantic. On this explication, Tasso's delightful excursions, his adventures of *Sophronia* and *Erminia*, so often condemned as excrescences, may be admired as perfectly legitimate beauties.

The poems of Homer were intended as historical compositions. They were revered and quoted as such, by the most circumspect of the national writers, as *Thucydides* and *Strabo*, for example. The romantic poets, on the other hand, seem to have intended nothing beyond a mere *delassement* of the imagination. The old Norman epics, it is true, exhibit a wonderful coincidence in their delineations of manners, with the contemporary chronicles. But this is not the spirit of Italian romance, which has rarely had any higher ostensible aim than that of pure amusement.

‘Scritta così come la penna getta,  
Per fuggir l’ozio, e non per cercar gloria,’

and which was right, therefore, in seeking its materials in the wildest extravagances of fiction, the *magnanime menzogne* of chivalry and the brilliant chimeras of the East.

The immortal epics of *Ariosto* and *Tasso* are too generally known, to require from us any particular analysis. Some light, however, may be reflected on these poets from a contrast of their peculiarities. The period in which *Tasso* wrote, was one of high religious fermentation. The *Turks*, who had so long over-awed Europe, had recently been discomfited in the memorable sea-fight of *Lepanto*, and the kindling enthusiasm of the nations seemed to threaten for a moment to revive the follies of the crusades. *Tasso's* character was of a kind to be peculiarly sensible to these influences. His soul was penetrated with religious fervor, to which, as *Serassi* has shown, more than to any cause of mysterious passion, are to be imputed his occasional mental aberrations. He was distinguished, more-

over, by his chivalrous personal valor, put to the test in more than one hazardous encounter; and, indeed, was reckoned the most expert swordsman of his time. Tasso's peculiarities of character were singularly suited to his subject. He has availed himself of this to the full, in exhibiting the resources and triumphs of Christian chivalry. The intellectual rather than the physical attributes of his supernatural agents, his solemn meditations on the fragility of earthly glory, and the noble ardor with which he leads us to aspire after an imperishable crown, give to his epic a moral grandeur, which no preceding poet had ever reached. It has been objected to him, however, that he preferred the intervention of subordinate agents to that of the Deity. But the God of the Christians cannot be introduced like those of Pagan mythology. They espoused the opposite sides of the contest; but wherever He appears, the balance is no longer suspended, and the poetical interest is consequently destroyed.

‘*Victrix causa Diis placuit, sed victa Catoni.*’

This might be sublime with the ancients, but would be blasphemous and absurd with the moderns, and Tasso judged wisely, in availing himself of inferior and intermediate ministers.

Ariosto's various subject,

‘*Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori,*’

was equally well suited with Tasso's to his own various and flexible genius. It did not, indeed, admit of the same moral elevation, in which he was himself perhaps deficient. But it embraced, within its range, every variety of human passion and portraiture. Tasso was of a solitary, as Ariosto was of a social temper. He had no acquaintance with affairs, and Gravina accuses him of drawing his knowledge from books instead of men. He turned his thoughts inward and matured them by deep and serious meditation. He had none of the volatile talents of his rival, who seems to have parted with his brilliant fancies, as readily as the tree gives up its leaves in autumn. Ariosto was a man of the world; and in his philosophy, may be styled an epicurean. His satires show a familiarity with the practical concerns of life, and a deep insight into the characters of men. His conceptions, however, were of the earth, and his pure style, which may be compared with Alcina's transparent drape, too often reveals to us the grossest impurity of thought.

The Muse of Tasso was of a heavenly nature, and nourished herself with celestial visions and ideal forms of beauty. He was a disciple of Plato, and hence the source of his general elevation of thought, and too often, of his mystical abstraction. The healthful bloom of his language imparts an inexpressible charm to the purity of his sentiments; and it is truly astonishing, that so chaste and dignified a composition should have been produced in an age and court so corrupt.

Both of these great artists elaborated their style with the utmost care, but with totally different results. This frequently gave to Tasso's verse the finish of a lyrical or rather of a musical composition; for many of his stanzas have less resemblance to the magnificent rhythm of Petrarch, than to the melodious monotony of Metastasio. This must be considered a violation of the true epic style. It is singular that Tasso himself, in one of his poetical criticisms, should have objected this very defect to his rival.\* The elaboration of Ariosto, on the other hand, resulted in that exquisite negligence or rather artlessness of expression, so easy in appearance, but so difficult in reality to be imitated.

'Facil' versi che costan tanta pena.'

The Jerusalem Delivered is placed by the nice discrimination of the Italian critics, at the head of their heroic epics. In its essence, however, it is strictly romantic, though in its form it is accommodated to the general proportions of the antique. In Ariosto's complicated fable, it is difficult to discern either a leading hero or a predominant action. Sismondi applauds Ginguené, for having discovered this hero in Ruggiero. But both these writers might have found this discovery, where it was revealed more than two centuries ago, in Tasso's own Discourses.† We doubt, however, its accuracy, and cannot but think that the prominent part assigned to Orlando, from whom the poem derives its name, manifests a different intention in the author.

The stately and imposing beauties of Tasso's epic have rendered it generally the most acceptable to foreigners; while the volatile graces of Ariosto have made him most popular with his own nation. Both poets have had the rare felicity, not only of obtaining the applause of the learned, but of circulating

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\* Discorsi Poetici. III.

† Discorsi Poet. II.

among the humblest classes of their countrymen. Fragments of the *Furioso* are still recited by the *lazzaroni* of Naples, as those of the *Jerusalem* once were by the gondoliers of Venice ; where this beautiful epic, broken up into ballads, might be heard for miles along the canals, on a tranquil summer evening. Had Boileau, who so bitterly sneers at the *clinquant* of Tasso, 'heard these musical contests,' says Voltaire, 'he would have had nothing to say.' It is worthy of remark, that these two celebrated poems, together with the *Aminta*, the *Pastor Fido*, and the *Secchia Rapita*, were all produced within the brief compass of a century, in the petty principality of the house of Este, which thus seemed to indemnify itself for its scanty territory, by its ample acquisitions in the intellectual world.

The mass of epical imitations in Italy, both of Ariosto and Tasso, especially the former, is perfectly overwhelming. Nor is it easy to understand the patience with which the Italians have resigned themselves to these interminable poems of seventy, eighty, or even ninety thousand verses each. Many of them, it must be admitted, are the work of men of real genius, and in a literature, less fruitful in epic excellence, would have given a wide celebrity to their authors ; and the amount of others of less note, in a department so rarely attempted in other countries, shows in the nation at large a wonderful fecundity of fancy.

The Italians, desirous of combining as many *jouissances* as possible, and extremely sensible to harmony, have not, as has been the case in France and England, divested their romances of the music of verse. They have rarely adopted a national subject for their story, but have condescended to borrow those of the old Norman minstrels ; and in conformity with the characteristic temperament of the nation, they have almost always preferred the mercurial temper of the Court of Charlemagne to the more sober complexion of the Round Table.\*

With a few exceptions, the romantic poets, since the time of Ariosto, appear to have gained as little in elevation of sentiment as in national feeling. The nice classification of their critics seems to relate only to their varieties of comic charac-

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\* The French antiquary, Tressan, furnishes an exception to the general criticism of his countrymen, in admitting the superiority of this latter class of Romances over those of Charlemagne.

ter ; and as we descend to a later period, the fine equivocal raillery of the older romances degenerates into a broad and undisguised burlesque. In the latter class, the Ricciardetto of Fortiguerra is a jest, rather than a satire upon tales of chivalry. The singular union, which this work exhibits, of elegance of style and homeliness of subject, may have furnished, especially in its introduction, the model of that species of poetry, which Lord Byron has familiarized us with in Don Juan, where the contrast of sentiment and satire, of vivid passion and chill misanthropy, of images of beauty and splenetic sarcasm, may remind one of the whimsical combinations in Alpine scenery, where the strawberry blooms on the verge of a snow-wreath.

The Italians claim to have given the first models of mock heroic poetry in modern times. The *Secchia Rapita* of Tassoni has the merit of a graceful versification, exhibiting many exquisite pictures of voluptuous repose, and some passages of an imposing grandeur. But these accord ill with the vulgar merriment, and general burlesque tone of the piece, which, on the whole, presents a strange medley of beauties and blemishes mixed up promiscuously together. Twelve cantos of hard fighting and cutting of throats are far too serious for a joke. The bloodless battle of the books in the *Lutrin*, or those of the pot-valiant heroes of *Knickerbocker*, are in much better keeping. The Italians have no poetry of a *mezzo carattere* like our *Rape of the Lock* ;\* where a fine atmosphere of irony pervades the piece, and gives life to every character in it. They appear to delight in that kind of travestie, which reduces great things into little, but which is of a much less spiritual nature than that which exalts little things into great. Parini's exquisite *Giorno*, if the satire had not rather too sharp an edge, might furnish an exception to both these remarks.

But it is time that we should turn to the *Novelle*, those delightful 'tales of pleasantry and love,' which form one of the most copious departments of the national literature. And here, we may remark two peculiarities ; first, that similar tales in France and England fell entirely into neglect after the fifteenth century ; while in Italy, they have been cultivated with the most unwearied assiduity from their earliest appear-

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\* Pignotti, *Stor. del. Toscana*, Tom. X. p. 132.



ance to the present hour :—secondly, that in both the former countries, the *fabliaux* were almost universally exhibited in a poetical dress ; while in Italy, contrary to the popular taste on all other occasions, they have been as uniformly exhibited in prose. These peculiarities are, undoubtedly, to be imputed to the influence of Boccaccio, whose transcendent genius gave a permanent popularity to this kind of composition, and finally determined the forms of elegant prose with his nation.

The appearance of the Decameron is, in some points of view, as remarkable a phenomenon as that of the Divine Comedy. It furnishes the only example on record, of the almost simultaneous developement of prose and poetry in the literature of a nation. The earliest prose of any pretended literary value in the Greek tongue, the most precocious of any of antiquity, must be placed near four centuries after the poems of Homer. To descend to modern times, the Spaniards have a little work, ‘*El Conde Lucanor*,’ nearly contemporary with the Decameron, written on somewhat of a similar plan, but far more didactic in its purport. Its style, though marked by a certain freshness and *naïveté*, the healthy beauties of an infant dialect, has nothing of a classical finish ; to which, indeed, Castilian prose, notwithstanding its fine old chronicles and romances, can make no pretension before the close of the fifteenth century. In France, a still later period must be assigned for this perfection. Dante, it is true, speaks of the peculiar suitableness of the French language in his day for prose narration, on account of its flexibility and freedom :\* but Dante had few and very inadequate standards of comparison, and experience has shown how many ages of purification it was to undergo, before it could become the vehicle of elegant composition. Pascal’s Provincial Letters furnish, in the opinion of the national critics, the earliest specimen of good prose. It would be more difficult to agree upon the author, or the period that arrested the fleeting forms of expression in our own language, but we certainly could not venture upon an earlier date than the conclusion of the seventeenth century.

The style of the Decameron exhibits the full maturity of an Augustan age. The finish of its periods, its long Latinized involutions, but especially its redundancy and Asiatic luxury

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\* De Vulg. Eloq. Lib. I. Cap. 10.

of expression, vices imputed to Cicero by his own contemporaries, as Quintilian informs us, reveal to us the model on which Boccaccio diligently formed himself. In the more elevated parts of his subject, he reaches to an eloquence not unworthy of the Roman orator himself. The introductions to his novels, chiefly descriptive, are adorned with all the music and the coloring of poetry; much too poetic, indeed, for the prose of any other tongue. It cannot be doubted that this brilliant piece of mechanism has had an immense influence on the Italians, both in seducing them into a too exclusive attention to mere beauties of style, and in leading them to solicit such beauties in graver and less appropriate subjects, than those of pure invention.

In the celebrated description of the Plague, however, Boccaccio has shown a muscular energy of diction, quite worthy of the pen of Thucydides. Yet there is no satisfactory evidence, that he had read the similar performance of the Greek historian, and the conjecture of Baldelli, to that effect, is founded only on a resemblance of some detached passages, which might well occur in treating of a similar disease.\* In the delineation of its fearful moral consequences, Boccaccio has, undoubtedly, surpassed his predecessor. It is singular, that of the three celebrated narratives of this distemper, that by the Englishman, De Foe, is by far the most circumstantial in its details; and yet that he was the only one of the three historians, who was not an eye-witness to what he relates.† The plague of London happened in the year succeeding his birth.

The Italian novelists have followed so closely in the track of Boccaccio, that we may discuss their general attributes without particular reference to him, their beauties and their blemishes varying only in degree. They ransacked every quarter for their inventions,—Eastern legends, Norman *fabliaux*, domestic history, tradition, and vulgar contemporary anecdote. They even helped themselves, *plenis manibus*, to one another's fancies, particularly filching from the Decameron, which has for this reason been pleasantly compared to a pawn-broker's shop. But no exceptions seem to be taken at such plagiarism, and as

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\* Vita di Boccaccio. Lib. II. S. 2. Note.

† It seems, probable, however, from a passage in Boccaccio, cited by Bandelli, that he witnessed the plague in some other city of Italy, than Florence.

long as the story could be disguised in a different dress, they cared little for the credit of the invention. These fictions are oftentimes of the most grotesque and improbable character, exhibiting no great skill in the *liaison* of events, which are strung together with the rude artlessness of a primitive *trouveur*; while most promising beginnings are frequently brought up by flat and impotent conclusions. Many of the *novelle* are made up of mere personal anecdote, proverbialisms, and Florentine table-talk, the ingredients of an Encyclopedia of wit. In all this, however, we often find less wit than merriment, which shows itself in the most puerile practical jokes, played off upon idiots, unfortunate pedants, and other imbeciles, with as little taste as feeling.

The *novelle* wear the usual light and cheerful aspect of Italian literature. They seldom aim at a serious or didactic purpose. Their tragical scenes, though very tragical, are seldom affecting. We recollect in them no example of the passion of love treated with the depth and tenderness of feeling so frequent in the English dramatists and novelists. They can make little pretension, indeed, to accurate delineation of character of any sort. Even Boccaccio, who has acquired, in our opinion, a somewhat undeserved celebrity in this way, paints professions rather than individuals. The brevity of the Italian tale, which usually affords space only for the exhibition of a catastrophe, is an important obstacle to a gradual development of character.

A remarkable trait in these *novelle* is the extreme boldness with which the reputations of the clergy are handled. Their venality, lechery, hypocrisy, and abominable impositions, are all exposed with an independence truly admirable. The head of the church himself is not spared. It is not easy to account for this authorized latitude, in a country where so jealous a *surveillance* has been maintained over the freedom of the press, in relation to other topics. Warton attempts to explain it, as far as regards the Decameron, by supposing that the ecclesiastics of that age had become tainted with the dissoluteness so prevalent after the plague of 1348; and Madame de Stael suggests that the government winked at this license, as the jesting of children, who are content to obey their masters, so they may laugh at them. But neither of these solutions will suffice; for the license of Boccaccio has been assumed more or less by nearly every succeeding novelist, and the jests of this

merry tribe have been converted into the most stinging satire on the clergy in the hands of the gravest and most powerful writers of the nation, from Dante to Monti.

It may be truly objected to the Italian novelists, that they have been as little solicitous about purity of sentiment, as they have been too much so about purity of style. The reproach of indecency lies heavily upon most of their writings, from the Decameron to the infamous tales of Casti; which, reeking with all the corruption of a brothel, have passed into several surreptitious editions during the present century. This indecency is not always a mere excrescence, but deeply ingrained in the body of the piece. It is not conveyed in innuendo, or softened under the varnish of sentiment, but is exhibited in all the nakedness of detail, which a debauched imagination can divine. Petrarch's encomiastic letter to his friend Boccaccio, written at the close of his own life, in which he affects to excuse the licentiousness of the Decameron from the youth of the author,\* although he was turned of forty when he composed it, has been construed into an ample apology for their own transgressions by the subsequent school of novelists.

It is true, that some of the popes, of a more fastidious conscience, have taken exceptions at the license of the Decameron, and have placed it on the Index. But an expurgated edition, whose only alteration consisted in the substitution of lay names for those of the clergy, set all things right again; a circumstance, says Bayle, in a notice of Boccaccio, which manifests somewhat more solicitude for the credit of their own order than for the cause of good morals.

Such adventures as the seduction of a friend's wife, or the deceptions practised upon a confiding husband, are represented as excellent pieces of wit in these fictions,—in some of the best of them even,—and often when their authors would be moral, they betray, in their confused perceptions of right and wrong, the most deplorable destitution of a moral sense. Grazzini (*il Lasca*), one of the most popular of the tribe of the sixteenth century, after invoking in the most solemn manner the countenance of the Deity upon his labors, and beseeching him to inspire his mind with 'such thoughts only as may redound to his praise and glory,' enters immediately in the next page, upon one of the most barefaced specimens of

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\* Petrarca Op. Ed. Basil. p. 540.

‘bold bawdry,’ to make use of the plain language of Roger Ascham, that is to be found in the whole work. It is not easy to estimate the demoralizing influence of writings, many of which, being possessed of the beauties of literary finish, are elevated into the rank of classics, and thus find their way into the most reserved and fastidious libraries.

The literary execution of these tales is, however, by no means equal. In some it is even neglected, and in all, falls below that of their great original. Still in the larger part, the graces of style are sedulously cultivated, and in many constitute the principal merit. Some of their authors, especially the more ancient, as Sacchetti and Ser Giovanni, derive great repute from their picturesque proverbialisms (*riboboli*), the racy slang of the Florentine mob; pearls of little price with foreigners, but of great estimation with their own countrymen. On these qualities, however, as on all those of mere external form, a stranger should pronounce with great diffidence. But the intellectual and moral character of a composition, especially the last, are open to universal criticism. The principles of taste may differ in different nations; but, however often obscured by education or habit, there can be only one true standard of morality.

We may concede, then, to many of the *novelle*, the merits of a delicate work of art, gracefulness, nay, eloquence of style, agreeable facility of narrative, pleasantry that sometimes rises into wit, occasional developement of character, and an inexhaustible novelty of situation. But we cannot help regretting that, while so many of the finest wits of the nation have amused themselves with these compositions, they should not have exhibited virtue in a more noble and imposing attitude, or studied a more scientific delineation of passion, or a more direct moral aim or practical purpose. How rarely do we find, unless it be in some few of the last century, the didactic or even satirical tone of the English essayists, who seldom assume the oriental garb, so frequent in Italian tales, for any other purpose than that of conveying, the better, a prudential lesson. Goldsmith and Hawkesworth may furnish us with pertinent examples of this. How rarely do we recognise in these *novelle* the living portraiture of Chaucer, or the philosophical point, which sharpens the pleasantry of La Fontaine; both competitors in the same walk. Without any higher object than that of present amusement, these productions, like many others of their

elegant literature, seem to be thrown off in the mere gaiety of the heart.

Chaucer, in his peculiarities, represents as faithfully those of the English nation, as his rival and contemporary, Boccaccio, represents the Italian. In a searching anatomy of the human heart, he as far excels the latter, as in rhetorical beauty he is surpassed by him. The Prologue to his *Canterbury Tales* alone contains a gallery of portraits, such as is not to be found in the whole compass of the *Decameron*; his friar, for example,

‘That somewhat lisped from his wantonnesse  
To make his English sweete upon his tonge;’

his worthy parson, ‘glad to teche and glad to lerne;’ his man of law, who,

‘Though so besy a man as he ther n’ as,  
Yet seemed besier than he was;’

and his inimitable wag of a host, breaking his jests, like Falstaff, indiscriminately upon every one he meets. Chaucer was a shrewd observer of the realities of life. He did not indulge in day-dreams of visionary perfection. His little fragment of *Sir Thopaz*, is a fine quiz upon the *incredibilia* of chivalry. In his conclusion of the story of the patient *Griselde*, instead of adopting the somewhat *fade* eulogiums of Boccaccio, he good-naturedly jests at the *ultra* perfection of the heroine. Like Shakspeare and Scott, his successors and superiors in the school of character, he seems to have had too vivid a perception of the vanities of human life to allow him, for a moment, to give into those extravagancies of perfection, which have sprung from the brain of so many fond enthusiasts.

Chaucer’s genius was every way equal to that of Boccaccio, yet the direct influence of the one can scarcely be discerned beyond his own age, while that of the other has reached to the present generation. A principal cause of this is the difference of their style; that of the former, exhibiting only the rude graces of a primitive dialect, while Boccaccio’s may be said to have reached the full prime of a cultivated period. Another cause is discernible in the new and more suitable forms which came to be adopted for that delineation of character which constitutes the essence of Chaucer’s fictions, viz. those of the drama, and the extended novel, in both of which Italian literature has, until very recently, been singularly

deficient. Boccaccio made two elaborate essays in novel-writing, but his genius seems to have been ill adapted to it, and in his strange and prolix narrative, which brings upon the stage again the obsolete deities of antiquity, even the natural graces of his style desert him. The attempt has scarcely been repeated until our day, when the impulse communicated by the English, in romance and historical novel-writing, to other nations on the continent, seems to have extended itself to Italy; and the extraordinary favor which has been shown there to the first essays in this way, may perhaps lead eventually to more brilliant successes.

The Spaniards, under no better circumstances than the Italians, made, previously to the last mentioned period, a nearer approach to the genuine novel. Cervantes has furnished, amid his caricatures of chivalry, many passages of exquisite pathos and pleasantry, and a rich variety of national portraiture. The same, though in a less degree, may be affirmed of his shorter tales, *Novelas Exemplares*, which, however inferior to those of the Decameron in rhetorical elegance, certainly surpass them in their practical application. But the peculiar property of the Spaniards is their *picaresco* novel, a mere chronicle of the adventures and mischievous pranks of young pickpockets and *chevaliers d'industrie*, invented, whimsically enough, by a Castilian grandee, one of the proudest of his *caste*; and which, notwithstanding the glaring contrast it affords to the habitual gravity of the nation, has, perhaps from this very circumstance, been a great favorite with it ever since.

The French have made other advances in novel-writing. They have produced many specimens of wit and of showy sentiment. But they seldom afford any wide range of observation, or searching views of character. The conventional breeding, that universally prevails in France, has levelled all inequalities of rank, and obliterated, as it were, the moral physiognomy of the different classes, which, however salutary in other respects, is exceedingly unpropitious to the purposes of the novelist. Molière, the most popular character-monger of the French, has indeed penetrated the *superficies* of the most artificial state of society. His spirited sketches of fashionable folly, though very fine, very Parisian, are not always very natural, that is, founded on the universal principles of human nature; and when founded on these, they are sure to be carried more or less into caricature. The French have

little of the English talent for humor. They have buffoonery, a lively wit, and a *naïveté* beyond the reach of art,—Rabelais, Voltaire, La Fontaine; every thing but humor. How spiritless and affected are the caricatures, so frequently stuck up at their shop-windows, and which may be considered as the popular expression in this way, compared with those of the English. It is impossible to conceive of a French Goldsmith or Fielding, a Hogarth or a Wilkie. They have, indeed, produced a Le Sage; but he seems to have confessed the deficiency of his own nation, by deriving his models exclusively from a foreign one.

On the other hand, the freedom of the political and social institutions both in this country and in England, which has encouraged the undisguised expansion of intellect, and of peculiarities of temper, has made them the proper theatre for the student of his species. Hence man has been here delineated with an accuracy quite unrivalled in any ancient or modern nation; and as the Greeks have surpassed every later people in statuary, from their familiarity with the visible naked forms of manly beauty, so the English may be said, from an analogous cause, to have excelled all others in moral portraiture. To this point, their most eminent artists have directed their principal attention. We have already noticed it in Chaucer. It formed the essence of the drama in Elizabeth's time, as it does that of the modern novel. Shakspeare and Scott, in their respective departments, have undoubtedly carried this art to the highest perfection of which it is capable, sacrificing to it every minor consideration of probability, incident, and gradation of plot; which they seem to have valued, only so far as they might be made subservient to the main purpose of a clearer exposition of character.

But it is time to return from the digression, into which we have been led by a desire of illustrating certain peculiarities of Italian literature, which can in no way be done so well as by comparing them with those of corresponding departments in other languages. Such a comparison abundantly shows how much deeper, and more philosophical, have been the views proposed by prose fiction in England than in Italy.

We have reserved the Drama for the last, as, until a very recent period, it has been less prolific in eminent models, than either of the great divisions of Italian letters. Yet it has been the one most assiduously cultivated from a very early



period, and this too by the ripest scholars, and most approved wits. The career was opened by such minds as Ariosto and Machiavelli, at a time when the theatres in other parts of Europe had given birth only to the unseemly abortions of mysteries and moralities. Bouterwek has been led into a strange error, in imputing the low condition of the Italian drama to the small number of men, of even moderate abilities, who have cultivated it.\* A glance at the long muster-roll of eminent persons employed upon it, from Machiavelli to Monti, will prove the contrary.† The unprecedented favor bestowed on the most successful of the dramatic writers, may serve to show, at least, the aspirations of the people. The *Merope* of Maffei, which may be deemed the first dawn of improvement in the tragic art, passed through sixty editions. Notwithstanding all this, the Italians, in comedy, and still more in tragedy, until the late apparition of Alfieri, remained far below several of the other nations of Europe.

A principal cause of their repeated failures has been often referred to the inherent vices of their system, which required a blind conformity with the supposed rules of Aristotle. Under the cumbrous load of antiquity, the freedom and grace of natural movement were long effectually impeded. Their first attempts were translations or literal imitations of the Latin theatre; some of these, however, though objectionable in form, contain the true spirit of comedy. Those of Ariosto and Machiavelli in particular, with even greater licentiousness of detail, and a more immoral conclusion, than belong either to Plautus or Terence, fully equal, perhaps surpass them, in their spirited and whimsical draughts of character. Ariosto is never more a satirist than in his comedies; and Machiavelli, in his *Mandragola*, has exposed the hypocrisies of religion, with a less glaring caricature, than Molière has shown in his *Tartuffe*. The spirit of these great masters did not descend to their immediate successors. Goldoni, however, the Molière of Italy, in his numerous comedies or farces, has succeeded in giving a lively graphic portraiture of local manners with infinite variety and comic power, but no great depth of interest. He has seldom risen to refined and comprehensive views of

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\* See the conclusion of his *History of Spanish Literature*.

† See Allacci's *Drammaturgia*, *passim*; and Riccoboni *Theatre Ital.* Tom. I. p. 187—208. Allacci's catalogue, as continued down to the middle of the 18th century, occupies nearly a thousand quarto pages.

society ; and his pieces, we may trust, are not to be received as faithfully reflecting the national character, which they would make singularly deficient both in virtue and the principle of honor. The writers who have followed in the footsteps of Goldoni, exhibit for the most part similar defects, with far inferior comic talent. Their productions, on the whole, however, may be thought to maintain an advantageous comparison with those of any other people in Europe, during the same period, although some of them, to judge from the encomiastic tone of their critics, appear to have obtained a wider celebrity with their contemporaries than will be probably conceded to them by posterity. The *comedies of art* which Goldoni superseded, and which were perhaps more indicative of the national taste, than any other dramatic performances, can hardly come within the scope of literary criticism.

The Italian writers would seem not even to have agreed upon a suitable measure for comedy ; some using the common *versi sciolti*, some the *sdruciolì*, others again the *martelliani*, and many more preferring prose.\* Another impediment to their success is the great variety of dialects in Italy, as numerous as her petty States ; which prevents the recognition of any one uniform style of familiar conversation for comedy. The greater part of the pieces of Goldoni are written, more or less, in the local idiom of one of the extremities of Italy ; an inconvenience which cannot exist, and which can hardly be appreciated in a country, where one acknowledged capital has settled the medium of polite intercourse.

The progress of the nation in the tragic art, until a late period, has been yet more doubtful. Some notion may be formed of its low state in the last century from the circumstance, that when the players were in want of a serious piece, they could find none so generally acceptable as an opera of Metastasio, stripped of its musical accompaniments. The appearance of Alfieri at this late season, of a genius so austere, in the midst of the voluptuous Sybarite effeminacy of the period, is a remarkable phenomenon. It was as if the severe Doric proportions of a Pæstum temple had been suddenly raised up amid the airy forms of Palladian architecture. The

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\* Professor Salfi affirms prose to be the most suitable, indeed, the only proper dress, for Italian comedy. See his sensible *critique* on the Italian comic drama, prefixed to the late edition of Alberto Nota's *Commedie*. Parigi, 1829.

reserved and impenetrable character of this man has been perfectly laid open to us in his own auto-biography. It was made up of incongruity and paradox. To indomitable passions, he joined the most frigid exterior. With the fiercest aristocratic nature, he yet quitted his native State, that he might enjoy unmolested the sweets of liberty. He published one philippic against kings and another against the people. His theoretic love of freedom was far from being warmed by the genuine glow of patriotism. Of all his tragedies he condescended to derive two only from Italian history; and when in his prefaces, dedications, or elsewhere, he takes occasion to notice his countrymen, he does it in the bitterness of irony and insult.

When he first set about his tragedies, he could compose only in a sort of French and Piedmontese *patois*. He was unacquainted with any written dramatic literature, though he had witnessed the theatrical exhibitions of the principal capitals of Europe. He was, therefore, to form himself all fresh upon such models as he might prefer. His haughty spirit carried him back to the *trecentisti*, especially to Dante, whose stern beauties he sedulously endeavored to transfuse into his own style. He studied Tacitus, moreover, with diligence, and made three entire translations of Sallust. He was greatly afraid of falling into the *cantilena* of Metastasio, and sought to avoid this by sudden abruptions of language, by an eccentric use of the articles and pronouns, by dislocating the usual structure of verse, and by distributing the emphatic words with exclusive reference to the sense.\*

This unprecedented manner brought upon Alfieri a host of critics, and he was compelled, in a subsequent edition, to soften down its most offensive asperities. He imputes to himself as many different styles of composition, as distinguish the works of Raphael, and it is pretty evident that he considers the last as near perfection as he could well hope to attain. It is, indeed, a noble style; with the occasional turbulence of a mighty rapid, it has all its fulness and magnificent flow; and it shows how utterly impossible it is, by any effort of art, to repress the natural melody of the Tuscan.

Alfieri effected a still more important revolution in the in-

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\* See a summary of these peculiarities in Casalbigi's Letter, prefixed to the late editions of Alfieri's tragedies.

tellectual character of the drama, arousing it from the lethargy into which it had fallen, and making it the vehicle of generous and heroic sentiment. He forced his pieces sometimes, it is true, by violent contrast, but he brought out his characters with a fulness of relief, and exhibited a dexterous combat of passion, that may not unfrequently remind us of Shakspeare. He dismissed all supernumeraries from his plays, and put into action what his predecessors had coldly narrated. He dispensed, moreover, with the curious coincidences, marvellous surprises, and all the *bei colpi di scena*, so familiar in the plays of Metastasio. He disdained even the poetical aid of imagery, relying wholly for effect on the dignity of his sentiments, and the imposing character of his agents.

Alfieri has been thought to have made a nearer approach to the Greek tragedy, than any of the moderns. He, indeed, disclaims the imitation of any foreign model, and he did not learn the Greek till late in life. But the drama of his own nation had always been servilely accommodated to the rules of the ancients, and he himself had rigorously adhered to the same code. His severe genius too, wears somewhat of the aspect of that of the Father of Grecian tragedy, with which it has been repeatedly compared. But any apparent resemblance in their compositions vanishes on a closer inspection. The assassination of Agamemnon, for example, forms the subject of a tragedy with both these writers. But on what different principles is it conducted by each! The larger proportion of the play of Æschylus is taken up with the melancholy monologues of Cassandra and the chorus, which, boding the coming disasters of the house of Atreus, or mourning over the destiny of man, are poured forth in a lofty dithyrambic eloquence, that gives to the whole the air of a lyrical rather than a dramatic composition. It was this lyrical enthusiasm, which, doubtless, led Plutarch to ascribe the inspiration of Æschylus to the influence of the grape.\* The dialogue of the piece is of a most inartificial texture, and to an English audience might sometimes appear flat. The action moves heavily, and the principal, indeed, with the exception of Agamemnon, the only attempt at character, is in the part of

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\* Sympos. LVII. Prob. 10. In the same spirit, a critic of a more polished age has denounced Shakspeare's Hamlet, as the work of a drunken savage! See Voltaire's Dissertation sur la Tragédie, &c. addressed to Cardinal Querini.

Clytemnestra, whose gigantic stature overshadows the whole piece, and who appals the spectator by avowing the deed of assassination, with the same ferocity with which she had executed it.

Alfieri, on the other hand, refuses the subsidiary aids of poetical imagery. He expressly condemns, in his criticisms, a confounding of the lyric and the dramatic styles. He elaborated his dialogue with the nicest art, and with exclusive reference to the final catastrophe. *Scenæ non levis artifex*. His principal aim is to exhibit the collision of passions. The conflicts between passion and principle in the bosom of Clytemnestra, whom he has made a subordinate agent, furnish him with his most powerful scenes. He has portrayed the Iago-like features of Ægisthus in the darkest colors of Italian vengeance. The noble nature of Agameinnon stands more fully developed than in the Greek, and the sweet character of Electra is all his own. The assassination of the king of men in his bed, at the lonely hour of midnight, must forcibly remind the English reader of the similar scene in Macbeth. But though finely conceived, it is far inferior to the latter in those fearful poetical accompaniments, which give such an air of breathless horror to the story. In solemn mysterious imaginings, who indeed can equal Shakspeare? He is the only modern poet, who has succeeded in introducing the dim form of an apparition on the stage with any tolerable effect. Yet Voltaire accuses him of mistaking the horrible for the terrible. When Voltaire had occasion to raise a ghost upon the French stage, (a ticklish experiment,) he made him so amiable in his aspect, that Queen Semiramis politely desires leave to 'throw herself at his feet, and to embrace them.'\*

It has been a matter of debate, whether Italian tragedy, as reformed by Alfieri, is an improvement on the French. Both are conducted on the same general principles. A. W. Schlegel, a competent critic whenever his own prejudices are not involved, decides in favor of the French. We must confess ourselves inclined to a different opinion. The three master spirits in French tragedy seem to have contained within themselves all the elements of dramatic creation; yet their best performances have something tame and unsatisfactory in them. We see the influence of that fine-spun web of criticism, which

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\* Semiramis. Acte III. S. 6.

in France has bound the wing of genius to the earth, and which no one has been hardy enough to burst asunder. Corneille, after a severe lesson, submitted to it, though with an ill grace. The flexible character of Racine moved under it with more freedom, but he was of too timid a temper to attempt to contravene established prejudices. His reply to one who censured him for making Hippolyte in love, in his *Phédre*, is well known: 'What would our *petits-mâîtres* have said, had I omitted it?' Voltaire, although possessed of a more enterprising and revolutionary spirit, left the essential principles of the drama as he found them. His multifarious criticisms exhibit a perpetual paradox. His general principles are ever at variance with their particular application. No one lauds more highly the scientific system of his countrymen;—witness his numerous dramatic prefaces, dedications, and articles in the *Encyclopedia*. He even refines upon it with hypercritical acumen, as in his commentaries on Corneille. But when he feels its tyrannical pressure on himself, he is sure to wince;—see, for example, his lamentable protest in his *Preface to Brutus*.

Alfieri acknowledged the paramount authority of the ancients equally with the French dramatic writers. He has but thrice violated the unity of place, and very rarely that of time. But with all his deference for antiquity, the Italian poet has raised himself far above the narrow code of French criticism. He has relieved tragedy from that eternal chime of love-sick damsels, so indispensable in a French piece, that, as Voltaire informs us, out of four hundred which had appeared before his time, there were not more than twelve, which did not turn upon love. He substituted in its place a more pure and exalted sentiment. It will be difficult to find, even in Racine, such beautiful personifications of female loveliness, as his *Electra*, *Micol*, and others. He has, moreover, dispensed with the *confidantes*, those insipid shadows, that so invariably walk the round of the French stage. Instead of insulated axioms, and long rhetorical pleadings, he has introduced a brisk moving dialogue, and instead of the ceremonious breeding, the *perruque* and *chapeau bordé* of Louis XIVth's court, his personages, to borrow an allusion from a sister art, are sculptured with the bold, natural freedom which distinguishes the school of Michael Angelo.

It is true, that they are apt to show too much of the same fierce and sarcastic temper, too much of a family likeness with himself and with one another; that he sometimes mistakes

passion for poetry ; that he has left this last too naked of imagery and rhetorical ornament ; that he is sometimes stilted when he would be dignified ; and that his affected energy is too often carried into mere muscular contortions. His system has indeed the appearance of an aspiration after some ideal standard of excellence, which he could not wholly attain. It is sufficient proof of his power, however, that he succeeded in establishing it, in direct opposition to the ancient taste of his countrymen, to their love of poetic imagery, of verbal melody, and voluptuousness of sentiment. It is the triumph of genius over the prejudices, and even the constitutional feelings of a nation.

We have dwelt thus long on Alfieri, because, like Dante, he seems himself to constitute a separate department in Italian literature. It is singular that the two poets, who present the earliest and the latest models of surpassing excellence in this literature, should bear so few of its usual characteristics. Alfieri's example has effected a decided revolution in the theatrical taste of his countrymen. It has called forth the efforts of some of their most gifted minds. Monti, perhaps the most eminent of this school, surpasses him in the graces of an easy and brilliant elocution, but falls far below him in energy of conception and character. The Stoical system of Alfieri would seem indeed better adapted to his own peculiar temperament, than to that of his nation, and the successful experiment of Manzoni in discarding the unities, and otherwise relaxing the unnatural rigidity of this system, would appear to be much better suited to the popular taste as well as talent.

Our limits, necessarily far too scanty for our subject, will not allow us to go into the Opera and the Pastoral Drama, two beautiful divisions in this department of Italian letters. It is singular that the former, notwithstanding the natural sensibility of the Italians to harmony, and the melody of their language, which almost sets itself to music as it is spoken, should have been so late in coming to its perfection under Metastasio. Nothing can be more unfair than to judge of this author, or indeed of any composer of operas, by the effect produced on us in the closet. Their pieces are intended to be exhibited, not read. The sentimental *ariettes* of the heroes, the romantic bombast of the heroines, the racks, ropes, poisoned daggers, and other fee-faw-fum of a nursery tale, so plentifully

besprinkled over them, have certainly in the closet a very *fade* and ridiculous aspect. But an opera should be considered as an appeal to the senses, by means of the illusions of music, dancing, and decorations. The poetry, wit, sentiment, intrigue, are mere accessories, and of value only as they may serve to promote this illusion. Hence the necessity of love,—love, the vivifying principle of the opera, the only passion in perfect accordance with its voluptuous movements. Hence the propriety of exhibiting character, in exaggerated color of light and shadow, the *chiar' oscuro* of poetry; as the imagination is most forcibly affected by powerful contrast. Yet this has been often condemned in Metastasio. On the above principle, too, the seasonable disclosures, miraculous escapes, and all the other magical apparatus before alluded to, may be defended. The mind of the spectator, highly stimulated through the medium of the senses, requires a corresponding extravagance, if we may so say, in the creations of the poet. In this state, a veracious copy of nature would fall flat and powerless; to reach the heart, it must be raised into gigantic proportions, and adorned with a brighter flush of coloring than is to be found in real life. As a work of art, then, but not as a purely intellectual exhibition, we may criticise the opera, and in this view of it, the peculiarities so often condemned in the artist, may be, perhaps, sufficiently justified.

The Pastoral Drama, that attempt to shadow forth the beautiful absurdities of a golden age, claims to be invented by the Italians. It was carried to its ultimate perfection, in two of its earliest specimens, the poems of Tasso and Guarini. Both these writers have adorned their subject with the highest charms of versification and imagery. With Tasso, all this seems to proceed spontaneously from the heart; while Guarini's *Pastor Fido*, on the other hand, has the appearance of being elaborated with the nicest preparation. It may, in truth, be regarded as the solitary monument of his genius; and as such, he seems to have been desirous to concentrate within it every possible variety of excellence. During his whole life, he was employed in retouching and enriching it with new beauties. This great variety and finish of details somewhat impair its unity, and give it too much the appearance of a curious collection of specimens. Yet there are those, and very competent critics too, who prefer the splendid patch-work of Guarini to the sweet, unsolicited beauties of his rival. Dr. Johnson has con-



demned both the *Aminta* and *Pastor Fido*, as 'trifles easily imitated, and unworthy of imitation.' The Italians have not found them so. Out of some hundred specimens cited by Serassi, only three or four are deemed by him worthy of notice. An English critic should have shown more charity for a kind of composition that has given rise to some of the most exquisite creations of Fletcher and Milton.

We have now reviewed the most important branches of the ornamental literature of the Italians. We omit some others, less conspicuous, or not essentially differing in their characteristics from similar departments in the literatures of other European nations. An exception may perhaps be made in favor of satirical writing, which, with the Italians, assumes a peculiar form, and one quite indicative of the national genius. Satire, in one shape or another, has been a great favorite with them, from Ariosto, or indeed we may say Dante, to the present time. It is, for the most part, of a light, vivacious character, rather playful than pointed. Their critics, with their usual precision, have subdivided it into a great variety of classes, among which the *Bernesque* is the most original. This epithet, derived not, as some have supposed, from the *rifacimento*, but from the Capitoli of Berni, designates a style of writing made up of the beautiful and burlesque, of which it is nearly impossible to convey an adequate notion, either by translation or description, in a foreign language. Even so mature a scholar as Mr. Roscoe has failed to do this, when in one of his histories, he compares this manner to that of Peter Pindar, and in the other to that of Sterne. But the Italian has neither the coarse diction of the former, nor the sentiment of the latter. It is generally occupied with some frivolous topic, to which it ascribes the most extravagant properties, descanting on it through whole pages of innocent irony, and clothing the most vulgar and oftentimes obscene ideas, in the polished phrase or idiomatic graces of expression, that never fail to disarm an Italian critic. A foreigner, however, not so sensible to the seductions of style, will scarcely see in it any thing more than a puerile debauch of fancy.

Historians are fond of distributing the literature of Italy into masses, chronologically arranged in successive centuries. The successive revolutions in this literature justify the division to a degree unknown in that of any other country, and a brief illustration of it may throw some additional light on our subject.

Thus the fourteenth century, the age of the *trecentisti*, as it is called, the age of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, is the period of high and original invention. These three great writers, who are alone capable of attracting our attention at this distance of time, were citizens of a free State, and were early formed to the contemplation and practice of public virtue. Hence their works manifest an independence and a generous self-confidence, that we seek in vain in the productions of a later period, forced in the artificial atmosphere of a court. Their writings are marked, moreover, by a depth of reflection not to be discerned in the poets of a similar period of antiquity, the pioneers of the civilization of their times. The human mind was then in its infancy. But in the fourteenth century, it seemed to awake from the slumber of ages, with powers newly invigorated, and a memory stored with the accumulated wisdom of the past. Compare, for example, the Divine Comedy with the poems of Homer and Hesiod, and observe how much superior to those latter writers is the Italian in moral and intellectual science, as well as in those higher speculations which relate to our ultimate destiny.\* The rhetorical beauties of the great works of the fourteenth century have equally contributed to their permanent popularity and influence. While the early productions of other countries, the poems of the Niebelungen, of the Cid, of the Norman *trouveurs*, and those of Chaucer even, have passed, in consequence of their colloquial barbarisms, into a certain degree of oblivion, the writings of the *trecentisti* are still revered as the models of purity and elegance, to be forever imitated, though never equalled.

The following age exhibits the reverse of all this. It was as remarkable for the general diffusion of learning, as the preceding had been for the concentration of talent. The Italian, which had been so successfully cultivated, came to be universally neglected for the ancient languages. It would seem as if the soil, exhausted by too abundant harvests, must lie fallow another century before it could be capable of production. The scholars of that day disdained any other than the Latin tongue, for the medium of their publications, or

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\* Hesiod, it is true, has digested a compact body of ethics, wonderfully mature for the age in which he wrote. But the best of it is disfigured with those childish superstitions, which betray the twilight of civilization. See, in particular, the concluding portion of his *Works and Days*.

even of their private epistolary correspondence. They thought with Waller, that

‘Those who lasting marble seek,  
Must carve in Latin or in Greek.’

But the marble has crumbled into dust, while the natural beauties of their predecessors are still green in the memory of their countrymen. To make use of a simile, which Dr. Young applied to Ben Jonson, they ‘pulled down, like Samson, the temple of antiquity on their shoulders, and buried themselves under its ruins.’

But let us not err, by despising these men as a race of unprofitable pedants. They lived on the theatre of ancient art, in an age when new discoveries were daily making of the long-lost monuments of intellectual and material beauty; and it is no wonder, that, dazzled with the contemplation of these objects, they should have been blind to the modest merits of their contemporaries. We should be grateful to men, whose indefatigable labors preserved for us the perishable remains of classic literature, and who thus opened a free and familiar converse with the great minds of antiquity; and we may justly feel some degree of reverence for the enthusiasm of an age in which the scholar was willing to exchange his learned leisure for painful and perilous pilgrimages, when the merchant was content to barter his rich freights for a few mouldering, worm-eaten folios, and when the present of a single manuscript was deemed of sufficient value to heal the dissensions of two rival States. Such was the fifteenth century in Italy; and Tiraboschi, warming as he approaches it, in his preface to the sixth volume of his history, has accordingly invested it with more than his usual blaze of panegyric.

The genius of the Italians, however, was sorely fettered by their adoption of an ancient idiom, and like Tasso’s Erminia, when her delicate form was enclosed in the iron mail of the warrior, lost its elasticity and grace. But at the close of the century, the Italian Muse was destined to regain her natural freedom in the court of Lorenzo de’ Medici. His own compositions, especially, are distinguished by a romantic sweetness, and his light popular pieces,—Carnascialeschi, Contadineschi,—so abundantly imitated since, have a buoyant exhilarating air, wholly unlike the pedantic tone of his age. Under these new auspices, however, the Italian received a

very different complexion from that which had been imparted to it by the hand of Dante.

The sixteenth century is the healthful, the Augustan age of Italian letters. The conflicting principles of an ancient and a modern school are, however, to be traced throughout almost the whole course of it. A curious passage from Varchi, who flourished about the middle of this century, informs us, that when he was at school, it was the custom of the instructors to interdict to their pupils the study of any vernacular writer, even Dante and Petrarch.\* Hence the Latin came to be cultivated almost equally with the Italian, and both, singularly enough, attained simultaneously their full developement.

There are few phrases more inaccurately applied, than that of the Age of Leo X., to whose brief pontificate we are accustomed to refer most of the magnificent creations of genius scattered over the sixteenth century, although very few, even of those produced in his own reign, can be imputed to his influence. The nature of this influence in regard to Italian letters may even admit of question. His early taste led him to give an almost exclusive attention to the ancient classics. The great poets of that century, Ariosto, Sanazzaro, the Tassos, Rucellai, Guarini, and the rest, produced their immortal works far from Leo's court. Even Bembo, the oracle of his day, retired in disgust from his patron, and composed his principal writings in his retreat. Ariosto, his ancient friend, he coldly neglected,† while he pensioned the infamous Aretin. He surrounded his table with buffoon literati, and parasitical poets, who amused him with feats of improvisation, gluttony, and intemperance,—some of whom, after expending on them his convivial wit, he turned over to public derision,—and most of whom, debauched in morals and constitution, were abandoned, under his austere successor, to infamy and death. He collected about him such court flies as Berni and Molza, but as if the papal atmosphere were fatal to high continued effort, even Berni, like Trissino and Rucellai, could find no leisure for his more elaborate performance, till after his patron's death. He magnificently recompensed his musical retainers,—making one an archbishop, another an archdeacon. But what did he

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\* Ercolano, ques. VIII.

† Roscoe attempts to explain away this conduct of Leo, but the satires of the poet furnish a bitter commentary upon it, not to be misunderstood.

do for his countryman Machiavelli, the philosopher of his age? He hunted, and hawked, and caroused; every thing was a jest, and while the nations of Europe stood aghast at the growing heresy of Luther, the merry pontiff and his ministers found strange matter of mirth in witnessing the representation of comedies that exposed the impudent mummeries of priestcraft. With such an example, and under such an influence, it is no wonder that nothing better should have been produced, than burlesque satire, licentious farces, and frivolous impromptus. Contrast all this with the elegant recreations of the little court of Urbino, as described in the Cortegiano. Or compare the whole result on Italian letters of the so much vaunted patronage of this luxurious pontiff with the splendid achievements of the petty State of Este alone, during the first half of this century, and it will appear that there are few misnomers which convey grosser misconceptions than that of the age of Leo X.

The seventeenth century (*seicento*) is one of humiliation in the literary annals of Italy; one, in which the Muse, like some dilapidated beauty, endeavored to supply the loss of natural charms by all the aids of coquetry and meretricious ornament. It is the prodigal use of 'these false brilliants,' as Boileau terms them, in some of their best writers, which has brought among foreigners an undeserved discredit on the whole body of Italian letters, and which has made the condemned age of the *seicentisti* a by-word of reproach even with their own countrymen. The principles of a corrupt taste are, however, to be discerned at an earlier period, in the writings of Tasso especially, and still more of Guarini. But it was reserved for Marini to reduce them into a system, and by his popularity and foreign residence to diffuse the infection among the other nations of Europe. To this source, therefore, most of these nations have agreed to refer the impurities, which, at one time or another, have disfigured their literatures. Thus the Spaniard Lampillas has mustered an array of seven volumes to prove the charge of original corruption on the Italians, though Marini openly affected to have formed himself upon a Spanish model.†

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\* Machiavelli, after having suffered torture, on account of a suspected conspiracy against the Medici, in which his participation was never proved, was allowed to linger out his days in poverty and disgrace.

† Obras suelt. de Lope de Vega, Tom XXI. p. 17.

In like manner, La Harpe imputes to them the sins of Jodelle and the contemporary wits, though these last preceded by some years the literary existence of Marini; and the vices of the English *metaphysical* school have been expressly referred, by Dr. Johnson, to Marini and his followers.

A nearer inspection, however, might justify the opinion, that these various affectations bear too much of the physiognomy of the respective nations in which they are found, and are capable of being traced to too high a source in each, to be thus exclusively imputed to the Italians. Thus the elements of the *cultismo* of the Spaniards, that compound of flat pedantry and Oriental hyperbole, so different from the fine *concetti* of the Italian, are to be traced through some of their most eminent writers, up to the fugitive pieces of the fifteenth century, as collected in their *Cancioneros*; and in like manner, the elements of the metaphysical jargon of Cowley, whose intellectual combinations and far-fetched analogies show too painful a research after wit for the Italian taste, may be traced in England through Donne and Ben Jonson, to say nothing of the 'unparalleled John Lillie,' up to the veteran versifiers of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries. Thus, also, some features of the *style précieux* of the hôtel de Rambouillet, so often lashed by Boileau, and laughed at by Molière, may be imputed to the malign influence of the constellation of pedants, celebrated in France under the title of Pleiades, in the sixteenth century.

The Greek is the only literature, which, from the first, seems to have maintained a sound and healthful state. In every other, the barbaric love of ornament, so discernible even in the best of the early writers, has been chastised only by long and assiduous criticism; but the principle of corruption still remains, and the season of perfect ripeness seems to be only that of the commencement of decay. Thus it was in Italy, in the perverted age of the *seicentisti*, an age yet warm with the productions of an Ariosto and a Tasso.

The literature of the Italians assumed in the last century a new and highly improved aspect. With less than its usual brilliancy of imagination, it displayed an intensity, and, under the circumstances in which it has been produced, we may add, intrepidity of thought, quite worthy of the great spirits of the fourteenth century, and a freedom and nature in its descriptions, altogether opposed to the heartless affectations of the

seventeenth. The prejudicial influence of their neighbors threatened at one time, indeed, to precipitate the language into a French *machéronico*; but a counter-current, equally exclusive, in favor of the *trecentisti*, contributed to check the innovation, and to carry them back to the ancient models of purity and vigor. The most eminent writers of this period seem to have formed themselves on Dante, in particular, as studiously as those of the preceding age affected the more effeminate graces of Petrarch. Among these, Monti, who, in the language of his master, may be truly said to have inherited from him 'Lo bello stile, che l'ha fatto onore,' is thought most nearly to resemble Dante in the literary execution of his verses; while Alfieri, Parini, and Foscolo approach him still nearer in the rugged virtue and independence of their sentiments. There seems to be a didactic import in much of the poetry of this age, too, and in its descriptions of external nature, a sober contemplative vein, that may remind us of writers in our own language. Indeed an English influence is clearly discernible in some of the most eminent poets of this period, who have either visited Great Britain in person, or made themselves familiar with its language.\* The same influence may be perhaps recognised in the moral complexion of many of their compositions, the most elegant specimen of which is probably Parini's satire, which disguises the sarcasm of Cowper in the rich embroidered verse which belongs to the Italians.

In looking back on the various branches of literature, which we have been discussing, we are struck with the almost exclusive preference given to poetry over prose, with the great variety of beautiful forms which the former exhibits, with its finished versification, its inexhaustible inventions, and a wit that never tires. But in all this admirable mechanism, we too often feel the want of an informing soul, of a nobler, or at least some more practical object, than mere amusement. Their writers too rarely seem to feel

'Divinity within them, breeding wings  
Wherewith to spurn the earth.'

They have gone beyond every other people in painting the intoxication of voluptuous passion; but how rarely have they

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\* Among these may be mentioned Monti, Pindemonte, Cesarotti, Mazza, Alfieri, Pignotti, and Foscolo.

exhibited it in its purer and more ethereal form ! How rarely have they built up their dramatic or epic fables on national or patriotic recollections ! Even satire, disarmed of its moral sting, becomes in their hands a barren, though perhaps a brilliant jest,—the harmless electricity of a summer sky.

The peculiar inventions of a people best show their peculiar genius. The romantic epic has assumed with the Italians a perfectly original form ; in which, stripped of the fond illusions of chivalry, it has descended through all the gradations of mirth, from well-bred raillery to broad and bald buffoonery. In the same merry vein, their various inventions in the burlesque style have been conceived. Whole cantos of these puerilities have been strung together with a patience altogether unrivalled, except by that of their indefatigable commentators.\* Even the most austere intellects of the nation, a Machiavelli and a Galileo, for example, have not disdained to revel in this frivolous debauch of fancy, and may remind one of Michael Angelo, at the instance of Pietro de' Medici, employing his transcendent talents in sculpturing a perishable statue of snow !

The general scope of our vernacular literature, as contrasted with that of the Italian, will set the peculiarities of the latter in a still stronger light. In the English, the drama and the novel, which may be considered as its staples, aiming at more than a vulgar interest, have always been made the theatre of a scientific dissection of character. Instead of the romping merriment of the *novelle*, it is furnished with those periodical essays which, in the form of apologue, of serious disquisition or criticism, convey to us lessons of practical wisdom. Its pictures of external nature have been deepened by a sober contemplation, not familiar to the mercurial fancy of the Italians. Its biting satire, from Pierce Plowman's Visions to the Baviad and Mæviad of our day, instead of breaking into vapid jests, has been effectually sharpened against the follies or vices of the age ; and the body of its poetry, in general, from the days of 'moralle Gower,' to those of Cowper and Wordsworth, breathes a spirit of piety and unsullied virtue. Even Spenser deemed it necessary to shroud the eccentricities of his Italian imagination in sober allegory ; and Milton, while he adopted in his *Comus* the beautiful, and somewhat luxurious form of the

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\* The annotations upon Lippi's burlesque poem of the *Malmantile Racquistata* are inferior in bulk to those only on the *Divine Comedy*.



Aminta and Pastor Fido, animated it with the most devotional sentiments.

The political situation of Italy may afford a key to some of the peculiarities of her literature. Oppressed by foreign or domestic tyrants, for more than five centuries, she has been condemned, in the indignant language of her poet,

‘Per servir sempre, o vincitrice o vinta.’

Her citizens, excluded from the higher walks of public action, have too often resigned themselves to corrupt and effeminate pleasure; and her writers, inhibited from the free discussion of important topics, have too frequently contented themselves with an impotent play of fancy. The histories of Machiavelli and of Guicciardini were not permitted to be published entire, until the conclusion of the last century. The writings of Alemanni, from some umbrage given to the Medici, were burnt by the hands of the common hangman. Marchetti’s elegant version of Lucretius was long prohibited on the ground of its epicurean philosophy; and the learned labors of Giannone were recompensed with exile. Under such a government, it is wonderful that so many, rather than so few writers should have been found with intrepidity sufficient to raise the voice of unwelcome truth. It is not to be wondered at, that they should have produced so few models of civil or sacred eloquence, the fruit of a happier and more enlightened system; that they should have been too exclusively devoted to mere beauties of form; have been more solicitous about style, than thought; have studied rather to amuse than to instruct. Hence the superabundance of their philological treatises and mere verbal criticisms, of their tomes of commentaries, with which they have illustrated or obscured their most insignificant poets, where a verse furnishes matter for a lecture, and a *canzone* becomes the text for a volume. This is no exaggeration.\* Hence, too, the frequency and ferocity of their literary quarrels; into which the Italians, excluded too often from weightier disquisition, enter with an enthusiasm, which in other nations can be roused only by the dearest in-

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\* Benedetto of Ravenna wrote ten lectures on the fourth sonnet of Petrarch. Pico della Mirandola devoted three whole books to the illustration of a *canzone* of his friend Benivieni; and three Arcadians published a volume in defence of the *Tre Sorelle* of Petrarch! It would be easy to multiply similar examples of critical prodigality.

terests of humanity. The comparative merit of some obscure classic, the orthography of some obsolete term, a simple sonnet, even, has been sufficient to throw the whole community into a ferment, in which the parties have not always confined themselves to a war of words.

The influence of academies on Italian literature is somewhat doubtful. They have probably contributed to nourish that epicurean sensibility to mere verbal elegance, so conspicuous in the nation. The great variety of these institutions scattered over every remote district of the country, the whimsicality of their titles, and still more of those of their members, have an air sufficiently ridiculous.\* Some of them have been devoted to the investigation of science. But a license, refused to individuals, will hardly be conceded to public associations; and the persecution of some of the most eminent has proved an effectual warning to confine their speculations within the inoffensive sphere of literary criticism. Hence the exuberance of *prose* and *lezioni*, endless dissertations on barren rhetorical topics; and those vapid attempts at academic wit, which should never have transcended the bounds of the Lyceum.

It is not in such institutions that the great intellectual efforts of a nation are displayed. Indeed all that any academy can propose to itself, is to keep alive the flame, which genius has kindled; and in more than one instance, they have gone near to smother it. The French academy, as is well known, opened its career with its celebrated attack upon Corneille; and the earliest attempt of the Cruscan was upon Tasso's Jerusalem, which it compelled its author to re-model, or in other words, to reduce, by the extraction of all its essential spirit, into a flat and insipid decoction. Denina has sarcastically intimated, that the era of the foundation of this latter academy corresponds exactly with that of the commencement of the decline of good taste. More liberal critics concede, however, that this body has done much to preserve the integrity of the tongue, and that a pure spirit of criticism was kept alive within its bosom, when it had become extinct in almost every other

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\* Take at hazard some of the most familiar, the 'Ardent,' the 'Frozen,' the 'Wet,' the 'Dry,' the 'Stupid,' the 'Lazy.' The Cruscan takes its name from Crusca, (bran); and its members adopted the corresponding epithets of 'brown bread,' 'white bread,' 'the kneaded,' &c. Some of the Italians, as Lasca, La Bindo, for instance, are better known by their frivolous academic names, than by their own.

part of Italy.\* Their philological labors have, in truth, been highly valuable; though perhaps not so completely successful as those of the French academicians. We do not allude to any capricious principle on which their vocabulary may have been constructed, an affair of their own critics; but to the fact, that, after all, they have not been able to settle the language with the same precision and uniformity with which it has been done in France; from the want of some great metropolis, like Paris, whose authority would be received as paramount all over the kingdom. No such universal deference has been paid to the Cruscan academy, and the Italian language, far from being accurately determined, is even too loose and inexact for the common purposes of business. Perhaps it is for this very reason better adapted to the ideal purposes of poetry.

The exquisite mechanism of the Italian tongue, made up of the very elements of music, and picturesque in its formation beyond that of any other living language, is, undoubtedly, a cause of the exaggerated consequence imputed to style by the writers of the nation. The author of the *Dialogue on Orators* points out, as one of the symptoms of depraved eloquence in Rome, that ‘voluptuous artificial harmony of cadence, which is better suited to the purposes of the musician or the dancer, than of the orator.’ The same vice has infected Italian prose from its earliest models, from Boccaccio and Bembo, down to the most ordinary book-wright of the present day, who hopes to disguise his poverty of thought under his melodious redundancy of diction. Hence it is that their numerous Letters, Dialogues, and their specimens of written eloquence, are too often defective both in natural force and feeling. Even in those graver productions, which derive almost their sole value from their facts, they are apt to be far more solicitous about style and ingenious turns of thought, as one of their own critics has admitted, than either utility or sound philosophy.†

A principal cause, after all, of the various peculiarities of Italian literature, of which we have been speaking, is to be traced to that fine perception of the beautiful, so inherent in every order of the nation, whether it proceed from a happier

\* See, in particular, the treatise of Parini, himself a Lombard, *De' principi delle Belle Lettere*. Part II. Cap. 5.

† Bettinelli. *Risorgim. d' Italia*. Introd. p. 14.

physical organization, or from an early familiarity with those models of ideal beauty, by which they are every where surrounded. Whoever has visited Italy must have been struck with such a sensibility to elegant pleasure, and such a refinement of taste in the very lowest classes, as in other countries belong only to the more cultivated. This is to be discerned in the most trifling particulars; in their various costume, whose picturesque arrangement seems to have been studied from the models of ancient statuary; in the flowers and other tasteful ornaments, with which, on *fête* days, they decorate their chapels and public temples; in the eagerness with which the peasant and the artisan, after their daily toil, resort to the theatre, the opera, or similar intellectual amusements, instead of the bear-baitings, bull-fights, and drunken orgies, so familiar to the populace of other countries; and in the quiet rapture with which they listen for hours, in the public squares, to the strains of an *improvisatore*, or the recitations of a story-teller, without any other refreshment than a glass of water. The author of a new musical piece for San Carlos hardly feels assured of its success, till it has received the approbation of the lazzaroni; and Cellini informs us, that his patron, the Duke of Tuscany, hesitated to pronounce upon his celebrated statue of Perseus, until it had been exposed to the criticism of the populace in the great square of Florence. Even the art of improvisation, carried to such perfection by the Italians, is far less imputable to the facilities of their verse, than to the poetical genius of the people; an evidence of which, is the abundance of *improvisatori* in Latin in the sixteenth century, when that language came to be widely cultivated.

It is time, however, to conclude our remarks, which have already encroached too liberally on the patience of our readers. Notwithstanding our sincere admiration, as generally expressed, for the beautiful literature of Italy, we fear that some of our reflections may be rather unpalatable to a people, who shrink with sensitive delicacy from the rude touch of foreign criticism. The most liberal opinions of a foreigner, it is true, coming through so different a medium of prejudice and taste, must always present a somewhat distorted aspect to the eye of a native. On those finer shades of expression, which constitute, indeed, much of the value of poetry, none but a native can pronounce with accuracy. But on its intellectual and moral character, a foreign critic is better qualified to decide;

he may be more perspicacious, even, than a native, in detecting those obliquities from a correct standard of taste, to which the latter has been reconciled by prejudice and long example, or which he may have learned to reverence as beauties.

There must be so many exceptions, too, to the sweeping range of any general criticism, that it will always carry with it a certain air of injustice. Thus while we object to the Italians the diluted, redundant style of their compositions, may they not refer us to their versions of Tacitus and Persius, the most condensed writers in the most condensed language in the world, in a form equally compact with that of the originals? May they not object to us Dante and Alfieri, scarcely capable of translation into any modern tongue, in the same compass, without a violence to idiom? And may they not cite the same hardy models, in refutation of an unqualified charge of effeminacy? Where shall we find examples of purer and more exalted sentiment, than in the writings of Petrarch and Tasso? Where of a more chastised composition, than in Casa or Caro? And where more pertinent examples of a didactic aim, than in their numerous poetical treatises on husbandry, manufactures, and other useful arts, which in other countries form the topics of bulky disquisitions in prose? This is all just. But such exceptions, however imposing, in no way contravene the general truth of our positions, founded on the *prevalent* tone and characteristics of Italian literature.

Let us not, however, appear insensible to the merits of a literature, pre-eminent above all others for activity of fancy and beautiful variety of form, or to those of a country so fruitful in interesting recollections to the scholar and the artist; in which the human mind has displayed its highest energies untired through the longest series of ages; on which the light of science shed its parting ray, and where it first broke again upon the nations; whose history is the link that connects the past with the present, the ancient with the modern, and whose enterprising genius enlarged the boundaries of the old world by the discovery of a new; whose scholars opened to mankind the intellectual treasures of antiquity; whose schools first expounded those principles of law, which have become the basis of jurisprudence in most of the civilized nations of Europe; whose cities gave the earliest example of free institutions, and when the vision of liberty had passed away, maintained their empire over the mind, by those admirable pro-

ductions of art that revive the bright period of Grecian glory ; and who, even now, that her palaces are made desolate, and her vineyards trodden down under the foot of the stranger, retains within her bosom all the fire of ancient genius. It would show a strange insensibility, indeed, did we not sympathize in the fortunes of a nation that has manifested, in such a variety of ways, the highest intellectual power ; of which we may exclaim, in the language which a modern poet has applied to one of the most beautiful of her cities,

O Decus, O Lux  
Ausoniæ, per quam libera turba sumus,  
Per quam Barbaries nobis non imperat, et Sol  
Exoriens nostro clarius orbe nitet!

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ART. III.—*Origin and Progress of the Useful Arts.*  
*The Frugal Housewife.* By the Author of *Hobomok*.  
Third Edition. Boston. 1830.

It would be presumptuous in us, to point out the merits or defects of a work so entirely beyond our jurisdiction as this ; at the same time, we would not have this writer suspect that we have introduced her name, merely to secure a title to our article. We have done it rather, to express our respect for an accomplished lady, to whom we have been indebted for entertainment in former times ; and though her present writings do not come within the reach of our criticism, we know how to estimate the moral self-denial, which appears in the devotion of her talents to the service of the young. We can recommend her *Juvenile Miscellany* to parents, as an excellent work for their children ; the defects in it are very trifling, and ought never to be mentioned, without giving the praise due to all, who, feeling themselves capable of higher efforts, are content to sacrifice such fame, for the better and more enduring reward of gratitude and affection.

We propose to give a slight account of several of the arts of life, which are alluded to in this work ;—to trace them downwards, showing from what beginning they sprang, and what improvements they underwent in the course of successive ages. There is no regular history of such arts, excepting Beckmann's, which is nothing more than a collection of notes on various subjects without system ; valuable and thorough,